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ABSTRACT

The educational reform movement of the 1980's has sought to deal with the current problems in the educational system of declining standards, unprepared students, and low levels of morale among teachers by seeking to impose higher and more rigorous standards to restore academic quality. The experience, however, of excellent business companies in the United States suggests that the road to excellence in education lies in shifting the focus of attention back to the individual and to ways of enhancing her/his creativity; emphasizing efforts to turn average students into "winners" rather than stressing the exceptional students and excluding the rest; and trusting the practitioners--teachers and principals--and encouraging their creativity. The solution to the current malaise in education lies in creating the conditions that make it possible for individuals to get the power to experiment, create, develop, test, and innovate; and in stimulating the ordinary people who inhabit our schools to unusual effort that will result in excellence. If the schools are to meet the foreseeable demands of a society that requires lifelong learning, the requirements will be threefold: (1) to demonstrate to all students that they are capable of learning and that learning is a useful and satisfying skill that will serve them well throughout their lives; (2) to provide the cognitive skills that serve as the basic tools for lifelong learning; and (3) to gradually put students in charge of their own learning so that they can make choices from among the multiple learning options that will face them as adults. (HB)

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EDUCATIONAL REFORM AND THE COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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When Connie Sutton called to ask if I would fill in today for Jim Fisher, I sympathized with the plight of any program chair who finds herself rather suddenly without a speaker. I have had a few nightmares myself on both sides of that fence. As a program chair, I worry until the speaker appears in person at the podium, and as a speaker, I have two recurring nightmares. One is that I miss the last plane that will get me there on time. The other is much worse: I make the plane, but arrive without my speech.

Fortunately, neither catastrophe has happened to me, but I can now add a third worry. I arrive, speech in hand, to face an audience that has heard it before. Now there is a realistic worry!

Prepared for presentation at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, San Diego, California, April 17, 1985.

Some of you have probably faced Connie Sutton's persuasive powers. While I was being sympathetic, she was being firm. So we finally agreed that since I could not write a new speech for this occasion, we would run the risk that some people in this audience might have heard what I have to say on this subject before. My best guess, is that while as many as 10 percent of you may have heard these remarks, only 1 percent of you will remember that you heard it before. So I'll plunge ahead.

I'm going to talk about the educational reform movement of the 1980s, and what it has to do with community colleges. There were at last count, some thirty national reports on education reform, most of which concluded that excellence must be found and returned to the schools. Most recently we have had a rash of reform reports directed toward higher education. In addition, the fifty states have appointed a total of 300 task forces and have sent them forth to look for excellence.

Education as a profession has a lot of accumulated experience in looking for excellence. For the past fifty years, educational reform efforts have appeared in cycles, each about a decade long (Sizer, 1983, p.1). We can look back just one decade to find a school reform movement

that almost parallels our own, with more than a dozen books and reports published between 1970 and 1976.

Why can't we find excellence in education and then hang on to it? The history of educational reform is that we generate intense criticism, followed by commissions and study groups. We then reform the curriculum, raise standards, restore prestige to teaching, and then somehow it is all swept away again by the rising tide of mediocrity.

John Gardner wrote one of the most articulate and thoughtful books on excellence in 1961. He observed that one of the "absurdly obvious truths of which we must continue to remind ourselves" is that there are many varieties of excellence.

> "In the intellectual field alone," he says, "there is the kind of intellectual activity that leads to a new theory, and the kind that leads to a new machine. There is the mind that finds its most effective expression in teaching and the mind that is most at home in research. There is the mind that works best in quantitative terms, and the mind that luxuriates in poetic imagery.
>
> ...There is a way of measuring excellence that involves comparison between people... and there is another that involves comparison between myself at my best and myself at my worst." (p.152)

There are many kinds of excellence, and at the center of the community college philosophy is the conviction that each student should have the opportunity to develop excellence in some area of human performance. Unfortunately, I think, our current educational reform movement defines excellence in rather narrow ways.

Many of the reports attribute the erosion of quality in education to the permissiveness of the 1960s and 70s and reason that the solution is to swing the pendulum in the opposite direction, toward more control, more requirements, and tougher standards. These prescriptions call for simple corrections of perceived excesses of the past. Not enough homework?--assign more. Not enough testing?--require more. Too many electives?--insist on more requirements. These undimensional corrections might be labeled the swinging pendulum solution. A pendulum is in constant motion, but it never goes anywhere. It simply swings from one extreme to the other. Indeed, the momentum gained from a swing to the left provides the energy for the swing to the right.

Those of you who work with underprepared students know that doing more of what has not worked for these students in the past is not the route to success. As one observer of the current mania for legislating standards observed, "if the kid can't high jump 4 feet, it does no good to raise the bar to 4'8"."

If we are not more thoughtful about the goal of quality and how to attain it, we will spend the 1980s correcting for the permissiveness of the 1960s and 1970s, and we will spend the 1990s correcting for the over-regulation of the 1980s. We might, I suppose, recommend more modest corrections, but that would simply slow down the pendulum, eventually stopping all movement.

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The spiral staircase would appear to be a more apt metaphor for school reform than the swinging pendulum. Whereas the swinging pendulum involves retracing old ground, the spiral staircase rises to new levels. We may circle back to look at old problems from new perspectives, but our motion is constantly upward to a higher plane of action. Schools of the 1980s are operating in a different plane from those of the 1950s, and no one is more aware of that than community colleges who are dealing with large numbers of students who would not have attended college in the 1950s. We need to find some new perspectives on educational reform if we are to avoid educational faddism and swinging pendulum solutions.

One such perspective is offered in the research and study currently dominating the business community. Within the past year or so, a number of best-selling books have claimed to know excellence when they see it in corporations and have gone on to make recommendations about how to attain higher productivity through creating climates of excellence in organizations.

In some ways, the business community is just about as faddish as the education community, but the current swing in business management toward human resource development is so thoroughly compatible with the purposes of education that it will behoove us to see what business is discovering about climates of excellence.

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The best-selling book entitled In Search of Excellence (Peters and Waterman, 1982) is a study of the most successful companies in America. The authors conclude that the single most pervasive theme in excellent companies is their profound respect for the individual worker. Rosabeth Kanter, the respected scholar from the Yale School of Management, also emphasizes industry's recent shift from scientific management techniques to the cultivation of environments which nurture people and their ideas. She claims that there is a renaissance in the business world that calls for "a wholly new mode of operation" consisting of a shift from "trusting the system" to "trusting people" (Kanter, 1983).

There are many explanations for the search for people-based excellence in American life, but one of the most compelling hypotheses is that proposed by Alvin Toffler, the futurist author of The Third Wave (1980). He identified three successive ways of economic growth. In the First Wave, land was the capital asset of an agricultural society. In the Second Wave, the machines of the industrial revolution created economic power. In the Third and current wave, dominated by computers and the production and processing of information, the capital asset is human beings. It is people who are the source of the creative ideas that provide the competitive edge in the information society. Ideas, says Rosabeth Kanter, are the "most potent economic stimulus of all" (1983, p.18).

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No wonder then that the nation is concentrating on the development of its human resources. For once, interest in people and interest in productivity and profits seem to coincide. How ironic, then, that the environments which have been found to stimulate excellence in corporate America are frequently the opposite of what is recommended for excellence in our schools and colleges.

When Peters and Waterman set out to look for corporate excellence, they found it at both MacDonalds and IBM--in the production of the lowly hamburger as well as in the glamour of high tech. Their criteria for excellence seemed not to reside in the prestige of the thing produced, but rather in the attitude and enthusiasm of the workers. They concluded that one of the main clues to corporate excellence lay in "unusual effort on the part of apparently ordinary employees" (p.xvii). There is a lot to think about in that deceptively simple conclusion. What do the books and reports on school reform have to say about that? Are there recommendations that stimulate "apparently ordinary" people to unusual effort?

In the first place, there is surprisingly little attention given to "ordinary people" in the school reform reports. There is the clear implication that the rising tide of mediocrity is made up of embarrassing numbers of ordinary

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people, and if we want to return excellence to education, we better go out and find more excellent people. Colleges of education are advised to select better candidates; colleges are encouraged to raise admissions standards, and the Federal government is urged to offer scholarships to attract top high school graduates into teaching. There is not a lot said in the education reports about how to stimulate unusual effort on the part of the ordinary people that we seem to be faced with in the schools and in most colleges.

"Excellent companies," say Peters and Waterman, "require and demand extradordinary performance from the average man" (prxii). Since the tips for getting such extraordinary performance are scattered throughout their book, let me select a few of them and measure them against the recommendations of the educational reform reports.

"We observed, time and again," wrote Peters and Waterman, "extraordinary energy exerted above and beyond the call of duty when the worker...is given even a modicum of apparent control over his or her destiny" (p.xxiii).

With a few notable exceptions, there isn't much inclination to give workers in education more control over their own destinies. In fact, external top-down control is frequently recommended as the proper antidote to the permissiveness of the 1960s and 1970s. Even the language of

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many of the recommendations implies an external authority who would regulate, control, and see that the proper check points are established and maintained. Ted Sizer (1984), stands in contrast to many of the recommendations and actions taken today when he advises those who want excellent schools to "trust teachers and principals--and believe that the more trust one places in them, the more the response will justify that trust" (p.214). Sizer adds the further caution that "Proud people rarely join professions that heavily monitor them" (p.219).

John Goodlad also bucks the tide of most of the reform movement when he resists the temptation to set forth a set of recommendations applicable to all schools. Peters and Waterman would support Goodlad's decison. They observed that the encouragement of individualistic entrepreneurial spirit was one of the hallmarks of excellent companies which tended, they observed "to create decentralization and autonomy, with its attendant overlap, messiness around the edges, lack of coordination, internal competition, and somewhat chaotic conditions in order to breed the entrepreneurial spirit." Excellent companies they found "had forsworn a measure of tidiness in order to achieve regular innovation" (p.301).

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It doesn't take much reading of the commission reports to conclude that schools, if they follow the recommendations, will do the reverse and forswear innovation in favor of tidiness. The curriculum will be tidied up, goals will be articulated, standardized tests will control transitions, prospective teachers will pursue a core of common learning, and their curriculum will be tidied up to include certain courses and certain experiences in specified sequences. Actually, there isn't much evidence that our current mania for tidiness will result in orderly schools with students and teachers pursuing learning with the contagious enthusiasm so essential to excellence.

Rosabeth Kanter (1984) warns against the mechanical solutions "that meet ever more refined minimum standards." She says "innovation is beginning to be recognized as a national priority" and "our emerging world requires more social and organizational innovation" (1984, p.19). Her solution is "to create conditions, even inside large organizations, that make it possible for individuals to get the power to experiment, to create, to develop, to test--to innovate." "Whereas short-term productivity can be affected by purely mechanical systems," she writes, "innovation requires intellectual effort. And that, in turn, means people. All people. On all fronts" (p.40).

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The school reform movement of the 1980s is heavily into creating mechanical top-down solutions that can be quickly implemented. While control and specification may define minimal standards, they may also stifle the spirit of innovation and experimentation that researchers are finding so essential to excellent organizations.

My conclusion from these recent works is that until we can stimulate the ordinary people who inhabit our schools to "unusual effort" we will not have lasting excellence in education. Certainly, concern about minimal standards is necessary, but it is hardly sufficient, and we may be doing more harm than good in the long run if we send forth messages that educational excellence can be legislated and regulated from state offices without also working at the task of creating climates of excellence at the local level.

Peters and Waterman suggest that one of the ways to stimulate unusual effort on the part of ordinary people is to make people members of winning teams while also recognizing each individual as a star in his or her own right. "Each of us," they say, "needs to stick out--even or maybe particularly, in the winning institution" (p.xxiii).

Here I have to hand it to the reformers. I don't think there is one of them anywhere who does not want schools to be proud of their programs, proud of their teachers, and proud of their students. They sincerely, and even desperately, want

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education to field a winning team. It is also quite clear that they recommend rewarding outstanding achievement. There will be special encouragement for outstanding students; there will be master teachers, plus travel funds and extra bonuses. All of this recognition will be done on a competitive basis, with the appropriate reward going to the winners. So far, so good. Winning people on winning teams seems a sure-fire formula for success.

But that isn't really what Peters and Waterman observed in excellent companies. They found that excellent companies, "turn the average Joe and the average Jane into winners" (p.239, emphasis added). That is a bit more difficult, it seems, than recognizing winners. The tough problem is not in identifying winners; it is in making winners out of ordinary people. That, after all, is the overarching purpose of education. No one in education, I think, works harder at that task than community college educators. Yet historically, in most of the periods emphasizing excellence, education has reverted to selecting winners rather than creating them.

In any era, colleges that are able to select winners among both students and faculty, are most likely to be perceived as quality institutions. Although "value added" is a sound educational concept and the ultimate educational challenge, it has not often been pursued with any vigor in education. Community colleges are frequently considered

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lower quality educational institutions than research universities, not on the basis of comparing the "value added" to their graduating classes, but by comparing the selectivity exercised in admitting their entering classes.

Peters and Waterman insist that there is no reason why organizations cannot design systems to support and create winners. Most excellent companies, they say, build systems "to reinforce degrees of winning rather than degrees of losing" (p.57).

At IBM, for example, sales quotas are set so that 70-80 percent of its sales people meet their quotas. At a less successful company, only 40 percent of the sales force meets its quota during a typical year. "With this approach," say the researchers, "at least 60 percent of the salespeople think of themselves as losers. They resent it and that leads to dysfunctional, unpredictable, frenetic behavior. Label a man a loser and he'll start acting like one" (p.57).

There is much in the present educational reform movement that should frighten us if, in fact, winning is important for ordinary people. Peters and Waterman observed that less-than-excellent organizations take a negative view of their workers. "They verbally berate participants for poor performance.... They want innovation but kill the spirit of the champion.... They design systems that seem calculated to tear down their workers' self-image" (p.57).

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That sounds a lot like what we are about in the educational reform movement of the 1980s. We are telling teachers that they are a sorry lot, scoring lower on the SAT than their fellow students in college. We are proclaiming that the deplorable state of the schools is an embarrassment to us internationally and a risk to our nation. We are telling students that they are losers and threatening them with loss of further educational opportunity if they don't shape up. It is very hard to feel like a winner anywhere in the educational system today. But, the critics will object, how can you improve the educational system if you don't face the facts? Fair question.

The "facts" seem to be that there are some excellent schools out there, that there are some exceptional teachers, that we do know something about making teaching and learning more effective, that high expectations are important to performance, and that financial support is absolutely essential. We also know that test scores have been falling, that expectations for students are not high enough to demand their best performance, and that until students experience success as a result of their own efforts, it will be hard for them to feel like winners. Even very young children know when they are learning and when they are not. It does no good to tell students of any age that they are doing fine if they are not. Thus, learning tasks must be realistic, and every

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student must have an opportunity to succeed at a learning task that is important. At the same time, we must provide the challenges that push good students to do their best. It is not an easy task, and throughout history it has been made ever more difficult by the growing diversity of our student populations.

In some two decades of trying to find answers to the question of how to provide education for all the people, I have reached the conclusion, that it is our commitment to the lock-step time-defined structures of education that stand in the way of lasting progress (Cross, 1976). It is simply unrealistic to think that all students can learn the same material, to the same standards of performance, in the same amount of time, taught by the same method. We continue to talk about individual differences. We know they exist; we have reliable measures of them. We even cherish them, but we fail to provide for them in our educational systems.

Most experiments in individualization are soon abandoned because they require too much work on the part of teachers who are faced with individualizing instruction in addition to their obligation to handle all of their traditional tasks.

Strangely enough our solution has never been to change the system to accommodate individual talents. Rather it has been to try in some way to reduce the diversity--through

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selection of students, through narrowing curricular choices, and through proclaiming that we expect too much of our schools and that they must be allowed to get back to basics.

Those are the familiar planks in the platforms of the school reform movement of the 1980s. We want to find some reasonably humane way to lop off the problem learners, to reduce the obligations of the schools, and to restrict the curricular options.

There are serious proposals to deny the losers in the educational race a high school diploma or entrance to a community college. There is not much doubt that the easiest way for an educational institution to raise its own quality is to get rid of problem learners. Don't accept them and don't certify them. Test scores will rise, teacher morale will improve, and the institution will be perceived as a quality place for serious learning.

The problem is that the society that supports this superficially excellent educational institution now has on its hands the educational rejects. Whose responsibility is it to convert them from a drag on society to productive members of that society? The chances are high that an illiterate mother or father in this generation will produce three or four more problem learners in the next generation. Clearly, we cannot afford to "improve" educational institutions at the expense of society. But it is distressing to see how many

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well-meaning but short-sighted legislators and educators are taking advantage of the current mandates for excellence by supporting proposals that can have the effect of eliminating from local high schools and colleges the very students who need their services most. Some years ago, one wag devised a motto for Admiral Rickovers' elitist recommendations, "Save the best; shoot the rest."

Selection is the easy route to quality--but it is a swinging pendulum solution that fails to address the underlying problems with curriculum, instruction, and teacher training. For better or for worse, our schools have to be concerned with maximizing the performance of "ordinary people." The school reform reports are on target, I think, when they suggest that all teachers at all levels have an obligation to improve the performance of students at all levels of ability.

One of the perennial problems with universal education however is the diversity in achievement that it brings into the average classroom. Many of the reports call for a core curriculum, frequently on the grounds that it will abolish the evils of tracking. A common core curriculum, however, without provisions for individualization, will simply replace parallel tracks with vertical ones. Instead of lower achieving students being shunted into vocational or general education curricula, they will occupy the lowest ranks of the academic core curriculum. There is ample research evidence to show that

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students who start school in the bottom third of the class will remain there throughout their dreary journey through the American school system (Cross, 1971).

Although I am convinced along with Ben Bloom, Jerome Bruner, and others that almost any child can learn the basic school curriculum, given enough time and appropriate help, I am not convinced that the core curriculum imposed on existing time-bound structures will abolish the evils of tracking.

As to the recommendations that schools should get back to defining their educational mission, there is always the assumption that the mission is to provide for the cognitive development of students. No one can quarrel with that. What some people are wondering is what organizations in our society should assume responsibility for moral development, common courtesy, civility, and yes, even driver training. The choice seems to be between adding these so-called frills to the schools or ignoring them in the hope that churches, families, and neighborhoods, will reorganize and reassert themselves to deal with them. The inevitable result, I should think, is the swinging pendulum. Schools restrict their responsibilities to intellectual and cognitive tasks until society feels that citizenship and morality need attention, and then there is no place to turn except to the schools.

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I believe that we must begin to question whether the ancient structures of education can cope with the diversity that is inherent in universal education. We need structures that are built, not only on the acceptance of individual differences, but on explicit recognition of their value to our society. To use Alvin Toffler's phrase, it is time to de-massify education.

A significant aspect of Alvin Toffler's Third Wave (1980), is the customization of products and services. Whereas the industrial revolution of the Second Wave emphasized mass production, the arrival of the Third Wave makes possible customized production. In the manufacture of clothing, for example, Second Wave production methods required the worker to place one layer of cloth on top of another, lay the pattern on top, and then with an electric cutting knife cut out the pattern and produce multiple identical cutouts of the cloth. These were then subjected to common processing and came out identical in size, shape, and color to be purchased by the masses at reasonable prices "off the rack."

The Third Wave laser machine operates on a radically different principle. Laser machines can be programmed to

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fill an order for one garment economically, and soon it may be possible "to read one's measurements into a telephone, or point a video camera at oneself, thus feeding data directly into a computer, which in turn will instruct the machine to produce a single garment, cut exactly to one's personal, individualized dimensions" (Toffler, 1980, p.184).

De-massification is also occurring in the mass media. Mass messages that were once a product of Second Wave communications are giving way now to highly specialized media audiences. The same year that the great general-purpose magazines such as Life, Look, and The Saturday Evening Post folded, 300 new special-interest magazines were born. We now have very few general purpose magazines and more than 4000 special-interest magazines (Naisbitt, 1982, p.100). The same thing is happening in radio and television. In 1950, there were 700 general purpose radio stations; today there are 9000, including Spanish networks, Black networks, all-sports, all-news or all-children's networks, not to mention gavel-to-gavel coverage of the House of Representatives. John Naisbitt (1982) predicts that by the end of the 1980s, ABC, CBS, and NBC will have half the viewers they have today, their mass audiences drawn away to the increasingly specialized options available on cable stations.

Although instructional programs appear generally oblivious to the potential power of the computer to custom-design

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education, we are beginning to customize testing. Second Wave testing called for identical machine-scorable answer sheets, batched by the thousands, and scored by the overlay of common patterns of rights answers. Third Wave testing calls for branching, customization, and diagnosis of individual learning problems. Student personnel work too has become more customized and more individualized. There are more special interest clubs and groups custom-designed to serve special needs populations. At the same time, computerized guidance systems are providing individualized career-guidance services that would be impossible without interactive computer programs. Despite such changes before our very eyes, most of the school reform recommendations of the 1980s propose Second Wave solutions in a Third Wave world. They suggest re-massifying rather than de-massifying education. Developmental education, it seems to me, is on the forefront of demassifying education, but the lessons we have learned about working with individuals may be swept away by the erection of common hurdles and the narrow restrictive definitions of excellence that seem to be part of the educational reform movement.

It is surprising how little attention is given to both the promises and the demands of the future. Although no one, I think, fails to mention that computer literacy will be a demand of the future, not much is said about preparing people to live in a world in which the pace of change is escalating

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with each generation. Indeed, arguments about what constitutes the common core of knowledge that everyone should know seem almost quaint in the face of the knowledge explosion. Between 6000 and 7000 scientific articles are produced each day, and information doubles every 5 1/2 years. By the time the average physician completes his or her training, half of all the knowledge and skills acquired in medical school are obsolete.

How do we educate people to live in a world in which entire industries are created and wiped out in a single decade? The most important lessons that we can teach our children are the skills and the attitudes that will be required of lifelong learners. No education, no matter how brilliantly designed and delivered, will last a lifetime. The greatest handicap any adult can have in the 21st century is a dislike of formal learning.

It is already clear that there is a growing gap between adults who have learned to enjoy learning and who use it to make their lives richer in every sense of that word, and those who dislike learning and are stuck in dead end and even disappearing jobs. A college graduate today is seven times as likely to be engaged in some form of adult education as a high school drop-out, and the gap between the educational "haves" and "have-nots" is widening as the learning opportunities for adults increase. One thing that we know for sure from all of the research on adult learning is that it is the already well-educated who rush to take advantage of the new opportunities

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that are appearing; the poorly educated stay away in droves (Cross, 1981).

It seems to me that if our schools are to meet the forseeable demands of the learning society, the requirements will be threefold: 1) to demonstrate to all students that they are capable of learning and that it is a useful, satisfying skill that will serve them well throughout their lives, 2) to provide the cognitive skills that serve as the basic tools for lifelong learning, and 3) to gradually put students in charge of their own learning so that they can make choices from among the multiple learning options that will face them as adults in the learning society.

On these requirements, the 1980s reforms are strong on only one of the three. They do want each child to master the basic and higher level learning skills. There is not, however, much attention given to creating atmospheres that stimulate enthusiasm for learning. We are approaching our task with grim determination, and there is little patience or interest in the slow learners who will almost certainly constitute one of our greatest social problems in the learning society that lies ahead. As community college educators know better than almost anyone else in the educational community, those we call "slow" learners are all too frequently "turned off" learners. Before we can even approach the problem of teaching

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basic skills, we must turn around their attitudes toward learning and toward themselves as learners.

Ted Sizer speaks most directly to the third requirement when he says, "A self-propelled learner is the goal of a school, and teachers should insist that students habitually learn on their own" (p.216). That is a goal we have not seen mentioned in most of the reports. In fact, the general direction is quite the opposite. We are gradually creating more dependence on authorities to specify the learning tasks, control the options available, determine standards, and evaluate outcomes. If we are creating a generation of young learners who become increasingly dependent on others to define standards of acceptable learning, are we also thinking of the demands that will be created on the learning society with millions of adults unprepared to assume responsibility for their own self-directed learning. We should, I suggest, start now to develop lifelong learners who are willing and eager to assume responsibility for their own continuous learning.

The community colleges of this nation were created to give all people a chance to be winners. We can't accomplish that national goal if some people are denied access to education. Nor can we accomplish it if students, after gaining admission to a college, find that there is nothing there to challenge them. Only through challenge do people grow. To paraphrase a familiar quotation, "Peoples' reach

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must exceed their grasp or what's an education for?"

You have spent the past four days considering the case for community colleges as leaders in teaching and learning. Without a doubt, the community colleges have taken on the most challenging teaching task in all higher education, and in my opinion, you have blazed the trails that will help us to accomplish the only legitimate purpose of the educational reform movement--access to quality education.

* * * *

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